



## **HIPAA PRIVACY & SECURITY PRIMER**

This brochure provides basic information about HIPAA Privacy and Security Rules and how they affect the way we do our jobs.

### **What is HIPAA?**

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) is a Federal law passed by Congress that protects the privacy of an individual's medical information.

### **What Does HIPAA Cover?**

- Health care transactions like eligibility, authorizations, claims and payments.
- Confidentiality and privacy of health information.
- Security of electronic systems that transmit and receive health information.

### **Who / What is Protected by HIPAA?**

- Persons receiving health care services provided by Plumas County employees.
- Persons receiving health care services paid for by Plumas County.
- Health information of County employees enrolled in the County health plan.
- Health information of deceased individual's whose health care services were paid for or provided by Plumas County.

### **What Information is Confidential?**

Any information related to the healthcare of an individual, which identifies or can be used to identify the individual, is confidential. This confidential information is protected by HIPAA and referred to as PHI or Protected Health Information. HIPAA applies to information communicated orally and in writing. It applies to information stored in hard copy or any electronic device or database, or that is transmitted through any electronic means.

### **What is the Notice of Privacy Practices (NPP)?**

The Notice of Privacy Practices describes how the County will handle PHI (our obligation to protect this information and the ways we may use or disclose it) and the individual's rights regarding their PHI.

### **I Don't Even Work Around Clients. Why Tell Me?**

You don't have to work directly with patients or clients to be affected by HIPAA. If you work for the County, you may see PHI. For example, Information Technology employees and fiscal employees may not see clients but they will see confidential information about them. If you walk through patient or client care areas on your way to your office you may see individuals utilizing County services. HIPAA says you must keep this information confidential. That means if you notice a friend or neighbor at the County as a client or patient, you must not disclose that to anyone else – not to co-workers, other friends, your family, or friends or family of the individual you saw.

### **May I share Information with a Co-Worker?**

No. Not unless your co-worker has a need to know the information.

### **What Does "Need to Know" Mean?**

Your need to know confidential information is defined by the job you do. If you must know the information to successfully perform your job duties, then you have a right to know the information. Not all co-workers need to know the same information as you in order to do their job.

### **What Happens if I Release Confidential Information?**

Violating the confidentiality and privacy of our clients and patients is serious and can result in discipline up to and including termination. Additionally, the misuse of client information is a violation of HIPAA and may result in fines and criminal penalties.

**What Should I do if I See Confidential Information?**

If you see confidential information unattended or unsecured, or you witness any practice that you think might result in release of PHI, you should either report it to your immediate supervisor or to a HIPAA Privacy Officer. The important thing is that you tell someone so that the problem can be corrected.

**What is the Difference Between HIPAA Privacy and Security Rules?**

The Privacy Rule focuses on how people handle protected health information (PHI) in any form. The HIPAA Security Rule covers security for PHI in its electronic form; PHI is considered electronic (ePHI) when it is on a computer, on a server, on a floppy disk or CD, or in transmission such as when you send an e-mail. The Security Rule requires that the County ensure the confidentiality, availability and integrity of the ePHI we create, receive, maintain or transmit.

**How is ePHI Protected?**

The County Information Technology Department has technical controls in place to ensure ePHI is protected from unauthorized access. Some of these controls include: unique user ID and passwords for network access; auditing who is accessing ePHI; having virus protection; backing up ePHI.

**What Else Can I do to Comply With HIPAA?**

- Be familiar with all Privacy and Security Policies related to your job.
- Treat all health information as confidential, whether you know it because of your job or learn it accidentally.
- Only access information you are specifically authorized to access.
- Only discuss confidential information with people who are specifically authorized to know the information.
- Take precautions such as closing the door and lowering your voice when you must discuss confidential information.
- Don't transmit confidential information by e-mail.
- Make sure PHI is secured when you step away from your work area. Log off your computer before leaving it unattended. Never share your computer password or leave it lying around.
- Always lock file cabinets that contain PHI and lock doors to offices where confidential information is housed.
- Always shred confidential information before discarding or recycling.
- Recognize and respect clients' rights and avoid retaliation.

**What Are the Key Client Rights Under HIPAA?**

- Right to receive the County's notice of privacy practices.
- Right to confidential communications.
- Right to access and obtain a copy of their PHI.
- Right to an accounting of some disclosures of PHI.
- Right to request a correction of PHI.
- Right to request restriction of uses and disclosures of their PHI.
- Right to file a privacy complaint without fear of retaliation.

If you have any questions or would like a copy of the HIPAA Privacy and Security Rules, please visit the HIPAA link on the County of Plumas website at: <http://www.countyofplumas.com>

You can contact the County Privacy & Security Officer by telephone at (530) 283-6315. You can contact the County's Technical Security Officer by telephone at (530) 283-6335.

Updated: December 7, 2006